

Army and Navy Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)  
( Armed Services YMCA) HABS No. RI-391  
50 Washington Street  
Newport Vicinity  
Newport County  
Rhode Island

HABS  
RI  
3-NEWP,  
79-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
RI,  
3-NEWP,  
79-

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### ARMY AND NAVY YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA)

(Armed Services YMCA)

HABS No. RI-391

**Location:** 50 Washington Street (bounded by Washington and Meeting Streets, River Lane and Farewell Street, at Washington Square), Newport, Newport County, Rhode Island.

USGS Newport Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
19.306820.4595580

**Present Owner:** Fifty Washington Square  
50 Washington Street  
Newport, Rhode Island 02840

**Present Occupant:** Fifty Washington Square, and several community and public service organizations, including Newport County Mental Health and New Visions (Community Action Program)

**Present Use:** Low income single-room-occupancy housing, emergency shelter, social service facility

**Significance:** The Army and Navy Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building, Newport (1911, Louis E. Jallade, architect) stands as an important local expression of the Beaux-Arts architectural style which embodies distinctive design elements of that style executed with fine craftsmanship. Further, the building is an excellent example of the type of institutional buildings constructed by the YMCA. The YMCA building derives historical significance through its associations with a major social reform movement in the twentieth century; with noted philanthropist Mrs. Thomas J. Emery, the building's benefactor; and with the impact of a military presence on Newport's history. From its opening in 1911 until 1973 the YMCA building performed a critical service for military enlisted men, particularly the Navy, in providing onshore residential, recreational and social facilities. The building's prominent location in Newport's civic center and the involvement of Newport's civilian society in YMCA volunteer activities helped foster and sustain an important link between the City of Newport and the armed services stationed there. By the 1960s declining financial support, increased mobility of the armed forces, and growing proportions of overseas assignments forced the closing of a number of Armed Services YMCAs. These factors, along with relocation of seven Navy fleet unit staffs and thirty-nine naval ships out of Newport, resulted in closing of the YMCA on December 31, 1973. The building remained vacant for a number of years. It was recently reopened, and sold in March 1988 to a consortium of private non-profit organizations who intend to continue its function of housing and sheltering the needy.

## Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1911: The dedication date, November 17, 1911, appears in contemporary newspaper accounts and numerous YMCA pamphlets; an interior dedication bas relief states "This building erected A.D. 1911 ..."
2. Architect: Louis E. Jallade (The Newport News, November 17, 1911, on microfilm, Newport Historical Society). Preliminary research indicates that Jallade (1876? - 1957), a New York architect, was also responsible for the design of the YMCA buildings at 124th Street, New York (ca. 1920), Hackensack, New Jersey (ca. 1929) and the Navy YMCA in Philadelphia (1926-28). The Newport YMCA of 1911 may be one of his earliest works. Jallade also designed the first unit (and possibly subsequent ones) of an innovative phased-construction library building at Skidmore College in 1940.  
  
Sculptor: Bela Lyon Pratt (The Newport News, November 17, 1911). Pratt (b. Norwich, CT 1867, d. Boston, MA 1917) studied at Yale University with Saint Gaudens, and at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. His works are displayed at Yale, The Boston Public Library, The Massachusetts State House, the Congressional Library, and numerous other locations. Berkeley Chapel in Middletown, RI contains his medallion of Bishop Clark.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal Description of Real Estate at 50 Washington Square Newport, Rhode Island: All that certain lot or parcel of land with buildings and improvements thereon, located in the City and County of Newport, State of Rhode Island, and bounded and described as follows:

Beginning at a point marked by a drill hole at the intersection of Farewell Street and Broadway; thence running northerly, North  $01^{\circ} 50' 00''$  East along the westerly side of Farewell Street a distance of 166.70 feet to a point marked by a drill hole at the intersection of Farewell Street and River Lane; thence turning and running North  $81^{\circ} 04' 21''$  West along the southerly side of River Lane a distance of 44.70 feet to a point marked by a drill hole at the intersection of River Lane and Meeting Street; thence turning and running South  $16^{\circ} 40' 39''$  West along the southeasterly side of Meeting Street a distance of 195.92 feet to a point marked by a drill hole at the intersection of Meeting Street and Broadway or Washington Square; thence turning and running South  $28^{\circ} 17' 57''$  East a distance of 12.65 feet to a point marked by a drill hole; thence turning and running South  $72^{\circ} 46' 57''$  East a distance of 28.07 feet to a point marked by a drill hole; thence turning and running North  $61^{\circ} 39' 33''$  East a distance of 70.77 feet to the point or place of beginning; said last three courses being bounded on Broadway and Washington Square where Broadway meets Washington Square.

Containing approximately 13,507 square feet of land.

BE ALL said measurements more or less or however otherwise they may be bounded or described.

BEING the premises designated as Lot No. 191 on Newport Tax Assessor's Plat 17, as presently constituted.

- 1911 The property was acquired by the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations in four (4) separate deeds recorded in Volume 93 at page 28; Volume 93 at page 30; Volume 90 at page 152; and Volume 93 at page 48 of Newport Land Evidence Records.
- 1988 The property was sold by the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, successor to The International Committee, to Fifty Washington Square by a deed executed March 18, 1988.
4. Builder: Norcross Brothers Company, Worcester, Massachusetts, contractors (The Newport News, November 17, 1911).
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans are known to exist. Early photograph and postcard views show building with original cornice, which was removed c. 1938-39 (Newport Historical Society Collections). A lengthy and detailed description of the original appearance is found in contemporary newspaper accounts (The Newport News November 9, 10 and 11, 1910 and November 17, 1911). YMCA pamphlets also show original appearance and early interior modifications. The cost of land purchase design and construction was approximately \$250,000 (The Newport News, November 17, 1911).
6. Alterations and additions: Intensive use of the YMCA building from opening day on soon demanded maintenance of building elements -- the marble front steps required replacement by 1919 -- and furnishings, as well as modifications to better fulfill functional purposes. In 1938-39 a major renovation program was undertaken. These renovations most likely included removal of the roof cornice, changes on the first floor, and perhaps improvements to utility systems. No plans of the original design or subsequent changes are known to exist. Early photographs and descriptions, however, provide some information as to the building's appearance. Treatment of interior finishes was largely plain and functional, with decorative embellishment restricted primarily to the space adjacent to the entrance. While changes have occurred to meet evolving needs, today the interior retains substantial integrity of plan and many important finishes.

#### B. Historical Context

Both the military and the YMCA had firmly established roots in Newport well before the 1911 construction of the new Army and Navy YMCA facility. A community YMCA had been organized during the nineteenth century, and interest in creating a resting place for military and naval personnel in the city resulted in establishment of a YMCA in 1903. It occupied two floors of a building on Thames Street between Church and Mary Streets. A fire caused the closing of this facility within a few years.

Newport's strategic location in lower Narragansett Bay had fostered the establishment of military installations from the eighteenth century onward. The Revolutionary War fort at Fort Adams was enlarged in 1799 and again amplified during the War of 1812 (Fort Adams National Historic Landmark District, Newport County, Newport, RI). In the early twentieth century,

sizable Army contingents were stationed at Fort Adams, and at Fort Greble on Dutch Island off Newport Harbor. The port city's naval and maritime associations were equally strong, with a legacy which included the achievements of the Newport brothers, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, hero of the War of 1812, and Commodore Matthew Perry, who opened the ports of Japan for trade in the 1850s. During the Civil War, the Naval Academy at Annapolis was temporarily located in Newport, and a naval presence in Newport expanded considerably in the 1880s. The Naval Torpedo Station was established on Goat Island; Coasters' Harbor Island became the site of the Naval Training Station; and in 1884 the Naval War College, which trained many great naval strategists and leaders, was founded.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century Newport had also become a summer haven for the nation's socially prominent and well-to-do. Palatial summer cottages were constructed along Bellevue Avenue and Ocean Drive (Bellevue Avenue and Ocean Drive National Historic Landmark Districts). The influx of summer residents and vacationers helped to stabilize the city's uneven maritime economic base well into the twentieth century.

Relations between the Army, the Navy and Newport's high society were governed by the mutual respect of two parallel hierarchies, each with its own rules of advancement. Parties and activities on shore provided gay social diversion for army officers and naval officers while the fleet was based in Narragansett Bay; the military presence meant that distinguished armed service personnel and foreign dignitaries visited Newport regularly. The Newport Social Index of 1908 listed not only summer residents, but also "personnel of diplomatic corps" and "officers of the Army and navy." Enlisted men were not, however, generally included in this circle. Newport's elite contributed to the well being of enlisted men, and also their city, largely through YMCA service and gifts.

Following the fire at the military YMCA's temporary quarters, construction of a permanent Army and Navy YMCA in Washington Square to serve enlisted men and military transients was made possible by Mrs. Thomas J. Emery (Mary Muhlenberg Hopkins, 1844-1927). Mrs. Emery, a resident of Cincinnati, Ohio, summered in Middletown at Mariemont estate, a large shingled "cottage" well known for its surrounding garden designed by the Olmsted firm. The house still stands, but the landscape has been altered by twentieth century residential development. Following her marriage, both she and her husband, a successful real estate developer and candle manufacturer, directed much of their wealth and energy to philanthropic purposes. They had two sons, Sheldon and Albert Emery, both of whom died young. Inheriting her husband's fortune upon his death in 1906, Mrs. Emery largely dedicated her life to philanthropic work, including buildings and programs for children, medicine, the arts, education and religious institutions across the country and in Europe. She also created the much-studied model community for workers, Mariemont, near Cincinnati, with John Nolen, landscape architect, and a team of architects. Her anonymous donation of \$250,000 for land purchase, and building of the YMCA was her major philanthropic contribution to Newport.

The Army and Navy YMCA doors opened November 17, 1911. For the next sixty-odd years, the YMCA provided a "home-away-from-home" for hundreds of thousands of enlisted men passing through Newport. An indication of the volume of traffic is contained in the fact that by 1919 the marble entrance steps needed replacement. That same year, 5,753 men passed through the door in a single twenty-four hour period. Cots were set up routinely to supplement the 114 rooms, and during summer months when the fleet was in, hundreds slept on the floor; many others had to be turned away to sleep outdoors. By 1920, the YMCA

International Committee established a uniform membership policy for all Army and Navy YMCAs in recognition of the migrant nature of their constituency; accordingly any uniformed enlisted man who used YMCA facilities was considered a member. In Newport, YMCA participation was heavy during both peace and war time. Despite regular maintenance, the building required renovation in 1938-39. Attendance records were set in 1944, to be exceeded by 143,965, or a total of 1,269,971 attendees, in 1951.

Amenities and services offered by the YMCA were similar to those offered at YMCAs elsewhere. Supplementing the basic banking, lodging, meals, hygiene, church service and recreation activities, were the numerous social events funded and organized by the local Women's Auxiliary including concerts, movies, and regular afternoon cocoa and cracker hours.

During and after construction numerous people, primarily through the Women's Auxiliary, donated funds to furnish and endow the building. Among them were, Mrs. Theodore Kane Gibbs (physical work department and endowment), Mrs. John Nicholas Brown (game room), Mrs. Elizabeth M. Page, Mrs. Emeline Olin, and Mr. Henry F. Eldridge (all endowment), and Mrs. Hugh D. Auchincloss (social activities). The renovations of 1938-39 were funded with a contribution from Mrs. Arthur Emmons, a summer resident and longtime supporter.

The work of the Newport Army and Navy YMCA continued through World War I and II and into the late twentieth century. During World War II, the YMCA was a member of the United Services Organization (USO) (founded 1941). With dissolution of the USO in 1946, the YMCA again became the sole service agency working on behalf of the armed services, formally changing the name of the Army and Navy Department to the Armed Services Department.

The Army and Navy YMCA is included within the boundaries of the Newport National Historic Landmark District designated by the National Park Service in 1968. The significance of the Landmark district was defined to include only those buildings constructed prior to about 1820. The Army and Navy YMCA is but one of a large number of architecturally and historically significant later buildings in the area.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The YMCA building is a handsome and functionally successful example of the Beaux-Arts style, rendered in pale buff masonry, brick and polychrome terra cotta. It meets an apparently unwritten standard for high quality design in YMCA buildings of this period. Extending back behind its elegant main block, the Newport YMCA makes optimal use of an awkwardly shaped area. Although large in size, the fragmenting of the building mass along Farewell Street reduces the overall sense of a massive structure. It is one of the few early twentieth century public buildings in Newport to use pale construction materials in this manner and one of only a handful of Beaux-Arts style buildings in the City.

2. Condition of the fabric: The exterior masonry is sound. The roof systems are generally in fair condition. Interior finishes and trim are in fair to good condition, reflecting intensive use of the building over time.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The primary masses are one, four and five stories, with basement. The irregularly shaped form measures approximately 70' (Washington Street) by 203' (Meeting Street) by 42' (River Lane) by 163' (Farewell Street), or a total area of approximately 9,500 square feet. The composition consists of four integrated masses visible from side elevation views plus a one-story polygonal bay at the southwest corner. The main facade is 5-bays wide.
2. Foundation: Reinforced concrete walls are 2' thick. Above grade is a 2' thick, light grey ashlar granite basement with molded watertable.
3. Wall construction: The first floor of the main block is sheathed in pale buff polished, coursed limestone, with an elaborate sculptured frieze ornamented with reeding, dentils, and YMCA symbols. The second, third and fourth floors are clad in pale buff glazed brick with slightly projecting quoined end bays. A frieze of blue, yellow, white, and green terra cotta panels and molding envelopes the fifth floor. In the end-bay panels, standing military figures flank shields ornamented with ships, cannonballs, anchors and other nautical and military symbols. The remaining panels contain winged cherub's heads set in a floral surround.

Treatment of the east and west elevations of the main block is similar to that of the entrance facade. The east elevation, which angles back into the center of the building, has a simpler fifth floor terra cotta frieze. The west elevation frieze has cherub's head panels and windows rather than panels in the end bays; on the ground floor a one-story, projecting, polygonal, limestone bay with roof balustrade, sculptural frieze, and round-arch windows repeating the main facade motifs, provides an excellent aspect down Washington Square.

The central block extends along Meeting Street with two bays visible from Farewell Street on the opposite side. Here the design is considerably less formal, with brick sheathing ornamented by simple string courses and more restrained cornice and roof parapet.

The gymnasium block is handled exclusively in brick. Ornamentation consists of molded limestone keys over the windows, stepped cornice, simple roof parapet, narrow string course and a wide, diamond pattern frieze band of raised brick on the south, east and north elevations. The band continues on the west elevation, but without the diamond pattern.

4. Structural system: Reinforced concrete beam and column system with slab flooring. Most walls are curtain walls, although the south interior wall of the gymnasium and the walls surrounding stairwells are partially load-bearing.

5. Terrace: Above the one-story section on Farewell Street, a projecting infill pavillion with pilasters and cornice sheathed in copper provides access from the second floor to a tile-floored outdoor terrace.
6. Chimneys: Rising from the northwest rear corner of the building is a brick cylindrical heating stack with corbelled cap.
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The central main entrance is set in a molded round-arch opening. A modern glass and metal doorway has replaced the original entrance treatment of double wood doors surmounted by a low broken, scrolled pediment with rectangular and fanlight transoms above. Original copper lanterns flanking the entrance remain.

Two secondary entrances are located on Meeting Street: one central with modern door set in plain surround; and one near the northwest corner with double four-panel wood doors.

- b. Windows: The two arched windows flanking the entrance have fanlight transoms and decorative ironwork in a band outlining the molded arch opening, and a flush-set balustrade. The east window retains its original multi-light french doors; the west window contains plate glass. Similar windows are located in the projecting one-story bay. Small, high, vertical openings with original, simple, heavy grills mark the end bays of the main facade. Fenestration of the upper floors consists of a regular rhythm of six-over-six, double-hung-sash, wood windows set in recessed openings with limestone lug sills and flared flush brick lintels with limestone keys, alternating with narrower four-over-four windows. This fenestration is typical throughtout the building, appearing also in pairs and with hinged upper transoms. At the gymnasium block on the east and west elevations are three high round-arch windows, now infilled with translucent insulated plastic.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is typically flat in form and covered in tar and gravel. The gymnasium roof is a low pitched gable, also tar and gravel.

- b. Cornices, eaves: On the main block, the original, wide, overhanging terra cotta cornice has been removed leaving a plain brick band, and the original recessed-paneled roof parapet has been sheathed in copper. On the east elevation, the first floor limestone cornice of the main entrance facade continues, minus the more elaborate sculptural carving, as the roof cornice of this section, with paneled brick parapet above. The middle block of the building retains a slightly projecting terra cotta cornice. On the gymnasium block, an unadorned brick parapet defines the roof line.



C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor plan: On the interior of the YMCA building a central hall runs on the first floor from the entrance back to the rear gymnasium block, with a wide-angled turn reflecting transition from the front to central blocks. Public spaces and administration offices flank the central hall, with the stairway and an adjacent triangular elevator located at the northeast corner of the main block. The plan of the upper four residential floors repeats the center block hall, while the front block corridor circles a central light-and-air shaft originating on the second floor. The utilitarian basement space housed the swimming pool (now covered over), a bowling alley converted to a shooting gallery, barber shop, lockers and checkroom.

Copy photographs of "existing conditions" floor plans accompany this documentation.

2. Stairways: The main stair runs as a dogleg from the basement to third floor, narrowing to a straight run above. The dogleg section has simple square baluster treatment and wood handrails. A brass handrail divides the basement to first floor run. One undistinguished secondary service stair exists at the Meeting Street entrance. It originally extended from the basement to second floor, but was later extended the full height of the building.
3. Flooring: The original floor covering exists, typically linoleum tile. The gymnasium floor is wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are typically plaster. Notable finishes appear in the two lounges located on either side of the main entrance lobby, the reading and writing room (east), and the social room (west) which incorporates the projecting bay at the Meeting Street/Washington Street corner. Spacious and well-lit by large windows, these rooms served as the primary social spaces for YMCA activities. Both rooms retain original oak paneling and decorative plasterwork as bands trimming exposed ceiling beams and as capitals on support piers. Classically-inspired stencilled ceiling designs also remain under later coats of paint.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Original, typical interior doors on residential floors are four- and five-panel oak doors with brass hardware, set in plain doorways. Similar original doors remain in scattered locations throughout the building. Modern interior doors are typically flush metal, sometimes with a single light.
  - b. Windows: Interior window trim is typically plain. The building is well lit by many good sized windows. In addition to the many windows, natural lighting is provided by a light well in the upper stories of the main block.
6. Decorative features and trim: The first floor east lounge, the "reading and writing room," contains a decorative fireplace mantel of cast plaster, and above it a large, bronze bas relief designed by sculptor Bela Lyon Pratt, and cast by the Gorham Company, 1911. The relief shows two sitting male figures, one in Army and one in Navy uniform, against a stylized simple landscape of land and water with the inscription, "This building erected in A.D. 1911 is dedicated to the use and comfort of the enlisted men of the Army and Navy. A mother's memorial to her sons Sheldon and Albert Emery."

Currently, the reading and writing room is separated from the hall by an oak-paneled wall containing various inscriptions and is entered through a door flanked by cast-iron columns with serpent or fish motif capitals and surmounted by a leaded fanlight transom. The opposite social room wall appears to have once had a similar treatment, but now displays a more modern character. Originally, definition between these rooms and the lobby may have been achieved by grilled screens.

7. Hardware: Original doors, on third through fifth floor residential areas and elsewhere, retain original simple brass hardware.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: The original steam-heating system remains. It consists of two oil-fired large boilers at the northwest corner of the basement and cast-iron radiators.
  - b. Lighting: With the exception of two exterior lanterns flanking the entrance, no original fixtures remain. Electricity "for 800 large lamps" was originally generated in the basement "heating and lighting plant" (The Newport News, November 17, 1911).
  - c. Plumbing: The original copper plumbing system and many original fixtures remain. Each residential floor is serviced by one communal, tiled, lavatory and shower.
  - d. Elevator: The original triangular elevator cab remains. It is located adjacent to the main staircase.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The YMCA commands a prominent location at the northeast corner of Washington Square, facing the north end of the Colony House of 1739-1741. Washington Square is the historic civic and commercial center of Newport and contains a number of notable eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century buildings around a triangular-shaped park. Configured to fill an entire, irregularly shaped city block bounded by Washington Street (south), Meeting Street (west), River Lane (north) and Farewell Street (east), the four intersecting masses of the YMCA building form a right-angled triangle with a truncated point at the Washington Street end.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: Existence and location of originals unknown. Recent drawings for project prepared by The Newport Collaborative, 14 Pelham Street, Newport, RI (1987-88).
- B. Historic views: Early postcards and photographs (Newport Historical Society Graphics Collections).
- C. Interviews: None conducted.

D. Bibliography:

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E. Likely sources not yet investigated: New York Times Obituary Index for additional biographical information on Louis E. Jallade; YMCA of USA Archives, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN.

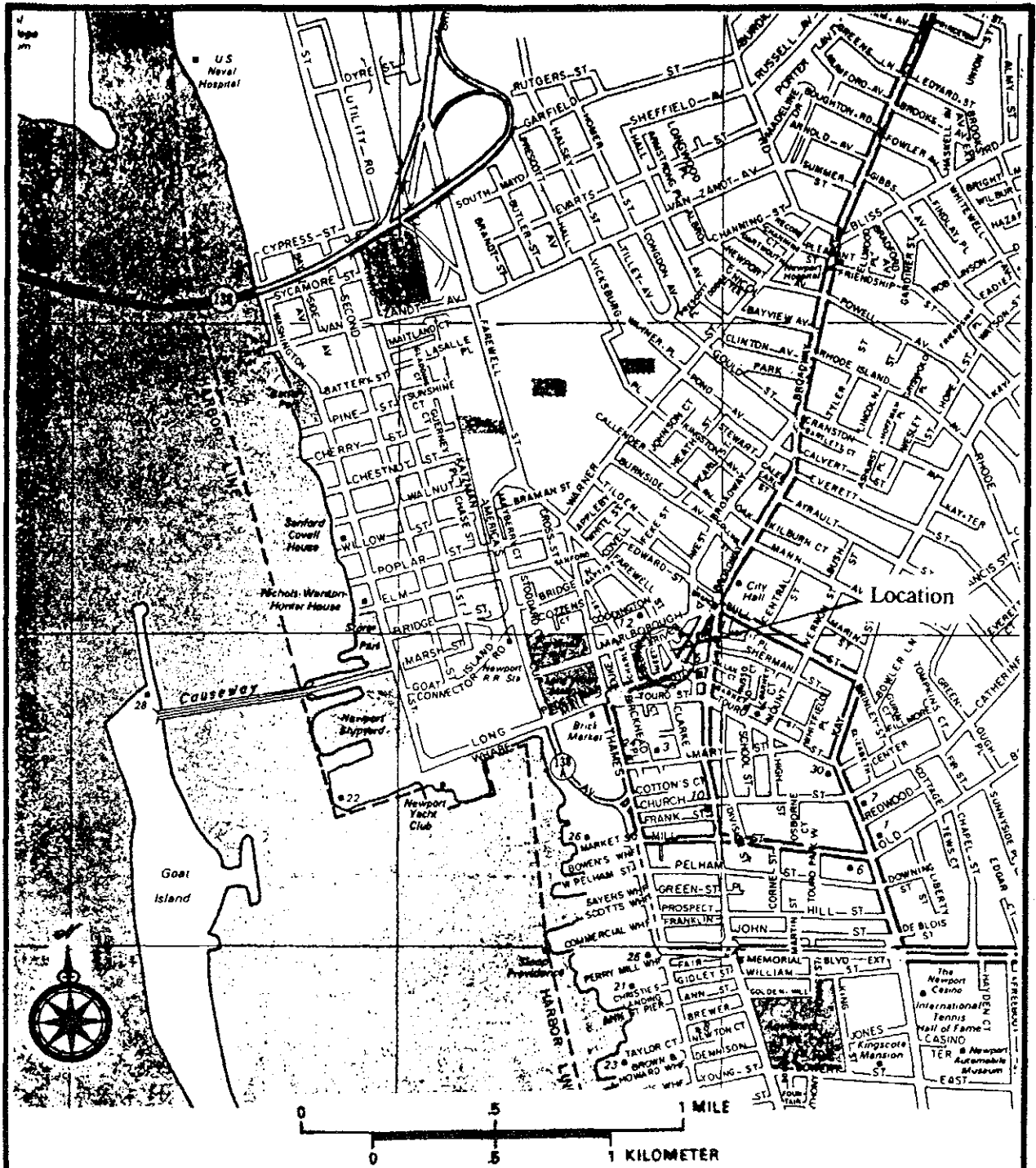
**PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION**

In response to plans of the National YMCA to sell the Newport Armed Services YMCA, the property has been purchased by a limited partnership comprised primarily of local non-profit community agencies. The building will be rehabilitated for use as low income housing, primarily for homeless individuals. When completed the facility will include an emergency shelter, transitional shelter, permanent housing for the homeless (including mentally ill),

efficiencies, one bedroom apartments, and office space rented to social service agencies. Rehabilitation plans include: Conversion of the gymnasium section into 23 one-bedroom units; Conversion of some of the rooms into 15 efficiency apartments; Significant upgrading of the remaining 70 rooms, common areas and shelter area including a provision for a counseling center; and rehabilitation of commercial space for social service agencies in two front lobbies and part of the basement area. The rehabilitation will meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation.

Funding sources include: The Department of Housing and Urban Development, RI Housing Mortgage Finance Corporation; City of Newport-Community Development Funds; RI Dept. of Mental Health Hospitals and Retardation, National Trust for Historic Preservation. The project will be syndicated using federal historic tax credits and low income housing tax credits allocated by The State of Rhode Island. Other foundation grants are pending.

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Date: April 1988



### HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

#### ARMY AND NAVY YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA)

(Armed Services YMCA)

Location:

50 Washington Street (bounded by Washington and Meeting Streets, River Lane and Farewell Street, at Washington Square), Newport, Newport County, Rhode Island.